

The Transmission of Wartime Memories: Films, Stories, and Dreams in Rural Villages of Shanxi, China

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Abstract: Why do the Chinese born in the post-Sino-Japanese War generation emotionally remember the war between Japan and China as if they had experienced it? In this paper, I, as a Japanese author, will discuss the construction of 'emotional memory' among Chinese people based on fieldwork in rural villages of Shanxi Province, which had been the forefront of the war. Focusing on dreams of war, the narratives of the war generation, propaganda movies, and collective farming of the 1960s as key factors in the farmers' emotional memory, this paper attempts to understand how these factors influenced each other and then penetrated into individual memories, as well as the resulting collective memories. Finally, I indicate how changes to a researcher's identity can be an important topic of oral history research.

Introduction

As a Japanese person born in the postwar years, one of the challenges I encounter when discussing the issue of war memories in China and Japan with Chinese people of my generation is that our level of emotional engagement with these memories tends to be different. Whereas Chinese people born in the postwar years strongly internalize the wartime past as if they had experienced it themselves, I, a Japanese, view the war as a past event, and have difficulty understanding why they remember it in that way. The Chinese, too, have come to sense this gap in how the war is remembered. The concept of 'emotional memory' put forth by Sun Ge at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences¹ became a subject of debate between Japan and China, and was an instance of the Chinese raising this issue. Sun Ge describes Chinese war memories as emotional memories that cannot be understood through a framework of objective truth. Dai Jinhua, a professor at Peking University, expresses this concept when she writes that "regardless of the fact that I was born in the peaceful postwar years, the Second Sino-Japanese War

¹ Sun Ge, "Shihua ruhe shishuo" [How to say the true feeling with true words], *Dushu*, March 2000 (translated into the Japanese as Sun Ge, "Nicchu sensou kanjo to kioku no kozu"[Emotion, Memory, and the Sino-Japanese War], *Sekai*, April 2000). The paper was later included in Sun Ge, *Ajia wo kataru kotonu jirenma* [Dilemmas in Discussing Asia (My translation)] (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2002).

has always evoked in me an intense physical experience.”² Is it not true that the dialogue between Japan and China regarding war memories hinges on how we understand this concept of emotional memories? I have struggled with this issue for many years, and it has forced me to face the problem of memory. The existing scholarship on memory, which so often takes as its subject monuments and memorial ceremonies, is not capable of explaining the phenomenon by which people internalize, as lived experiences, events that they have not directly experienced. For this reason, when addressing the war memories of the Chinese, we have had to grope through our research, from the methodological stage onward. I would like to suggest that this type of memory can more accurately be called a transmission of experience than a reinterpretation of events. The opportunity for these memories to develop lies precisely in the way how individuals receive or share the socially represented past.

Through a process of trial and error, I selected oral history as my method for understanding war memories in this paper. My aim is to discuss the ways in which a generation of Chinese who did not experience the war have internalized “collective memories” of that war, and, in particular, to focus on the processes by which memories are shared and transmitted. Although this work inevitably requires me to confront the media of memory, my intention is not to discuss those media themselves but, rather, to reflect on how people absorb the past through them.

The study was carried out in villages in Yu County, Shanxi, an area that was on the front lines of the Sino-Japanese war. I began interview surveys in this region in earnest in 2006, ultimately interviewing over 200 individuals. Most of them are living in 33 villages in the northern and western parts of Yu county, and some of them in Yuxian County town and Taiyuan City, the capital of Shanxi province (see Appendix 1 for a map). These interviews provide the primary source material for this article.³

² Sun Ge, Dai Jinhua, Takahashi Tetsuya, Sakai Naoki, “‘Zadankai’ sensō no kanjōkioku no kabe wo dounorikoeruka” [‘Round table’: How to overcome the wall of emotional war memories], *Sekai*, November 2000, pp.190-205.

³ Surveys of victims of sexual violence began in Yu County, Shanxi, in 1996. In 1999, 10 survey participants brought a lawsuit against Japan seeking an apology and compensation. This paper was preceded by the activities of the Sanseishō Akirakanisuru Kai’ [Group to Find Truth in Shanxi], which supported the lawsuit and carried out surveys. I myself found a way into this research, and also met people who assisted in this study through my participation in the group. The surveys by the Group to Find Truth in Shanxi are collected in Yoneko Ishida and Tomoyuki Uchida (Eds.), *Kōdo no Mura no Seibōryoku: Dānyantachi no Sensō ha Owaranai* [Sexual Violence in the Loess Villages: A Never-ending War] (Tokyo: Soudosha, 2004).

I Overview and Wartime History of Yu County, Shanxi

1. The natural environment and village life in Yu County, Shanxi



Fig.1 A village of Yu County in autumn

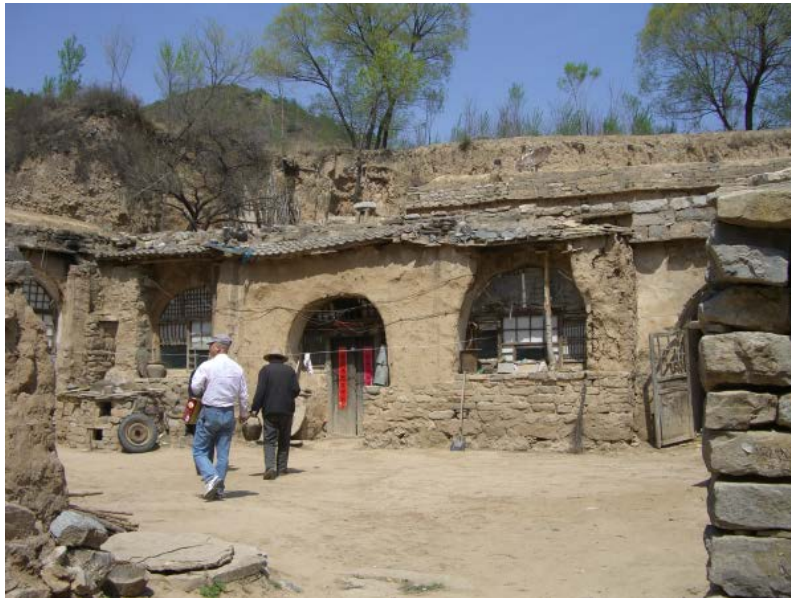


Fig.2 Cave dwelling called yaodong

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In the villages of Yu County, the Loess Plateau spread over the land, and the rainfall is only 590 mm per year (Figure 1). Villagers make their living as farmers and are largely self-sufficient, but harvests fluctuate depending on the rainfall as the farms are not irrigated. The villagers live in cave dwellings carved into rock walls (Figure 2), which stay cool in the summer and warm in winter thanks to underfloor heating systems called *ondol*. Economically, the region is impoverished. Cash income comes only from young people who leave the village to work, and the goods in circulation are extremely limited. Still, most ordinary households have a television, which appears to be the primary medium for transmitting information.

2. *History of the Second Sino-Japanese War*

The Imperial Japanese army arrived in this region in 1938. Between 1937 and 1945, the army's Fourth Independent Mixed Brigade, which had occupied Taiyuan City, gradually expanded its influence to the rural districts, building bases in some villages and occupying surrounding villages. Meanwhile, the Communist forces (the Eighth Route Army) were moving from one remote village to the next as they hid out deep into the mountains, away from the main roads. Around the same time, the Kuomintang National Revolutionary army (Yan Xishan's army) was also moving in and out of villages, with the result that the entire region came to be at the frontlines of the war. In August 1940, the Communist army won the Hundred Regiments Offensive, forcing the retreat of the Japanese army from villages. However, the retaliatory actions of the Japanese army that followed were exceedingly harsh, with even more villages turned into Japanese army bases and more new batteries built. During this time, the Japanese army carried out a number of massacres and established an uninhabited zone⁴ around the occupied areas where the Communist army was hiding out. The Japanese army occupied this area continuously until it retreated from Jinguishu in 1944 and Xiyan Town and Yuxian County in 1945 (see the map at the end of this paper for place names). During the retreat, the Japanese army once again carried out massacres.⁵

⁴ The Japanese army forbade villagers to live in these zones and burned many houses in order to create a buffer zone between itself and the Communist army.

⁵ For information on these events, see Zhonggong Shanxi shen Yuxian xianwei dangshi yanjiushi ed., *Zhonggong Shanxi shen Yuxian lishi dashijishu 1* [*Chronicle of Yu County, Shanxi, China (Vol. 1)*] (Beijing Wenjin chubanshe, 1993), and Kato Nobuhiro, "Daniang tachi no mura wo ossotta sensō [The War that Came to Auntie's Village]" in *Kōdo no Mura no Seibōryoku* (ibid, pp. 126-185).

During the Japanese army's occupation of the region, the daily task of delivering information to the bases from the surrounding villages was divided up among males in the villages, who performed the task in turn. Each base had a 'Weichi hui' [Peace preservation association], a governmental structure made up of Chinese, as well as a 'Jinbei dui' [Security force] and a 'Qingxiang dui' [Cleaning-up village force], both armed forces made up of Chinese, allowing several dozen Japanese to exploit the labor of many times that number of Chinese.

In each village, a mayor was designated to cooperate with the Japanese army (in China they are called 'false mayors'). These mayors delivered rations and human resources according to orders from the Peace preservation associations. Many of the mayors are said to have been 'double agents' who were secretly in contact with the Communist forces and provided them with information. In the bases, the Japanese army requisitioned villagers' homes and established multiple facilities reminiscent of 'comfort stations.' Through the Peace preservation associations, women from the outlying villages were delivered to these facilities, where they were locked up and raped by soldiers.⁶ In the same way, the men who were enlisted in the Peace preservation associations and Security forces were forcibly brought from the villages. Literate men, of which there were few in the villages, were particularly singled out for service in the Peace preservation associations.⁷

Meanwhile, the Communist army had established a moveable government in the mountainous regions and launched a guerilla war against the Japanese army. The army installed underground party members in each village to provide information, make the women produce shoes for the army, and carry out activities to educate the villagers. In some villages, a subset of villagers formed militias and carried out guerilla attacks.

Those where the Communist army was hiding out were burned down and turned into uninhabited zones. The former residents of these uninhabited zones

⁶ According to an interview with ZM (male, b. 1930), four locations similar to comfort stations were established in Jinguishu. In addition to the comparatively large sites, there were also a number of smaller sites in ordinary cave dwellings. According to Ishida and Uchida, a similar site was established in Xiyan Town (Ishida and Uchida, "Sanseishō Nihongun ianjo to Uken no seibōryoku" [Japanese 'comfort stations' in Shanxi and sexual violence in Yu County] in *Kodo no mura no seibōryoku* (ibid, pp. 238-271).

⁷ The members of the Preservation Association included village teachers and people who had graduated from some city colleges, and they could at least write Chinese letters. Some of them participated in the association voluntarily, but most of them were forced to do so as they themselves had been kidnapped or their family members had been taken hostage by the Japanese army.

hid in mountain caves, sneaking back to their villages to take food and other items when the chance arose. In doing so, however, they put their lives on the line, since anyone found in the uninhabited zone was killed without mercy. A September 1941 declaration by Commander Katayama of the Fourth Independent Mixed Brigade listed the names of 79 villages in the second district of Yu County (the eastern region) and 65 villages in the fourth district (the northern region), giving notice that these villages would become uninhabited zones and ordering all residents to leave within one week.⁸

Following the establishment of the People's Republic of China, villagers who had cooperated with the Japanese army or the Kuomintang became the target of purges and criticism in multiple political campaigns. After 1980s, these campaigns were no longer held. However, even today, the feud between those villagers who had criticized and those who had been criticized still continues. Moreover, the brand of 'counterrevolutionary' also impacted the career prospects and formative years of children born to these villagers after the war, further complicating memories of the war in China. The memories of the war heard in the interview today are often referred to alongside memories of these political campaigns, with people who had been labeled as 'counter revolutionary,' and their children, having difficulties voicing their experiences because of the long political oppression. Such unspeakable memories should be a challenging issue in the discussion of the war memory.⁹

3. Interview Methods

Interviews in the study region were carried out at or near the homes of villagers (Figures 3, 4), with Zhang Shuangbin, a teacher at an elementary school in Yangquan, and Li Guiming, a farmer in Xiyan Town acting as guides and Zhao Jingui, a professor at Shanxi University's Japanese Studies Center, and Li Shuxia, a professor at Shanxi University's Business College acting as interpreters. In most cases, I conducted the interviews myself in Chinese, but when the local dialect was strong and difficult to understand, the interviews were conducted through an interpreter. While this paper deals primarily with the narratives about dreams shared by fifty interviewees, the content relies heavily on information gained

⁸ From the photograph of the proclamation on p. 435 of *Yuxian zhi* (Yuxianshizhi bianzuan weiyuanhui ed., *Yuxianzhi* [History of Yu County] (Beijing, Fangzhichubanshe, 1995)).

⁹ I discussed the memory of the 'counter revolutionaries' and their children in my articles (Yumi Ishii, "Nicchūsensō niokeru Tainichikyōryokusya no Kioku" [Memories of Chinese collaborators with Japan in the Sino-Japanese War], *Shisō*, No. 1096, August 2015, and "Kioku to Rekishi no Kōsaku" [Crossing Memory and History], *Gendai chūgoku kenkyū*, No. 37, 2016).

from the totality of the interviews, even when they are not directly mentioned.

II Dreams and Movies about the Second Sino-Japanese War

1. Regionally-Shared Dreams of War



Fig. 3 Outdoor interview with a villager



Fig. 4 Interview with an old man in his yaodong

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When I first began interviews in this area, I was struck by the diversity of the villagers' war memories. Collective memories cannot be easily detected in interviews, and I found that I needed to delve into people's consciousness (or unconsciousness) from some particular perspective. After asking over 100 people to talk about the war without pursuing any particular theme, "war dreams" finally emerged as a common point. Of the 32 people who either spoke spontaneously about dreams or responded to my questions about them, 23 described similar war dreams. As shown in Table 1 (next page), the content of these dreams was similar for the generation that experienced the war and the generation born after the war, involving a story of being chased by the Japanese army and waking up just on the verge of being captured. For example, QZ, who belongs to the postwar generation (male, b. 1956) explains the dream as follows.¹⁰ The passages below are for the most part excerpted from my own literal translations of interviews. In order to convey the feeling of the narratives, I have quoted the villagers' expressions, as spoken, to the extent possible.

I've had dreams. For one, it was because I'd heard from the older generation what the Japanese were like during the war and also, because I'd seen the open-air movies. So there was a period when I was having dreams about the war with Japan all the time. Sometimes I didn't remember clearly what the dream was about, but (I knew it was a dream about the Anti-Japanese aggression—here and below, parentheticals are my additions), and then at other times I heard the voice of an elderly person saying, "Hurry! Hurry! Run away!" and I was desperately running away, because the Japanese army had come to the village. But I didn't know where I should run, so I was just running and running, hiding in the mountains or in between the ditches, afraid that I would be caught by the Japanese. I think I layered the stories of the elders onto the open-air movies.

Similarly, LY (male, b. 1943) describes the following when I asked, "So, have you ever dreamt about the war?":¹¹

Yes. There's no way I couldn't have. I'd never seen a Japanese person, but watching movies and TV, for one, since those images were so strong, I'd have dreams all the time of being chased by the Japanese

¹⁰ Interview with QZ at the Q residence in Lizhuang on December 11, 2006.

¹¹ Interview at the L residence in Gaozhuang on December 3, 2006.

Table 1: Summary of interviews about dreams, by birthyear group

Birthyears	Number of participants with dreams	Number of participants without dreams	Typical content of dream
1926-1938 (Villagers who experienced the war)	12	0	The war was scary. Even now sometimes I dream about the war at night and wake up because it's so scary. I am startled and I wake up. In the dreams everyone is running away and being beaten (by the Japanese soldiers). I have dreams all the time. Dreams where people are running.
1943-1966 (Postwar generation, who had participated in collective agriculture)	10	3	Sometimes after watching TV I'd dream about being chased by the Japanese army. In the dream, the tree on the top of the tall mountain that served as a signal had fallen over, so I was hurrying to run away. I dreamt about what the old people used to talk about a long time ago.
1967-1990 (Postwar generation, who had not participated in collective agriculture)	1	6	I don't remember clearly, but I've dreamt about being chased by the Japanese army.

* For more information, see Appendix 2 (pages 33-34).

and having no place to escape to. You probably think it's weird, since I didn't experience it myself. But all the same, I'm constantly being chased by the Japanese with no place to hide, and just in the nick of time I wake up. When I wake up I'm soaked in sweat.

HZ (female, b. 1928), who belongs to the generation that experienced the war, still frequently has the following war dream:¹²

¹² Outdoor interview with HZ on August 20, 2007 in Zhaojiazhuang, translated by Li Shuxia.

Ishii: Are you still frightened of the Japanese army?
 HZ: Of course I am. Recently I've been having dreams about the Japanese army, and it's so scary I can't stand it. It is so scary. Because (at the time) I was just a girl of 16.
 Ishii: Do you have that dream often?
 HZ: When the dream ends, I suddenly wake up. It's because I'm so frightened.
 (Abridged)
 Ishii: What kind of scenes are in the dream?
 HZ: What kind of dreams do I have? Well, everyone is running away, and the Japanese army is beating (the villagers), and bullets from their guns are flying at us making a pow, pow sound. The sound echoes. They are beating people and shooting, and it's scary. But I cannot afford to die.

The three individuals given as examples above do not live in the same village, and they have not had any contact with one another. Regardless, they all repeatedly have dreams about the war that follow a similar pattern. As shown in Table 1, 12 individuals in the generation that experienced the war mentioned dreams in the interviews, and all had virtually the same dream. In addition, of the



Fig. 5 Outdoor interview with HZ at Zhaojiazhuang

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20 individuals from the postwar generation whom I asked about dreams, 11—a majority—had also had the same dream. The story is shared by the pre- and postwar generations, as well as across a wide geographical area. However, within the postwar generation, the likelihood of having the dream declines with the age of the individual.

In general, people frequently forget their dreams, and it is likely that the individuals who were able to speak clearly of dreams about the Second Sino-Japanese War were either particularly tormented by the fear the dreams evoked or had the same dream repeatedly. The fact that 23 of 32 people shared the same dream suggest that it is either some type of war memory that left a strong imprint on peoples' consciousness, or that it is the primary factor that mediates war memories between generations. Furthermore, the wide geographical distribution of the respondents indicates that the content of the dream is shared throughout the entire region.

In this paper, I would like to examine the process of sharing war memories through a consideration of why people in this region came to have similar war dreams.

2. *The Relationship between Movies and Dreams*

As the interviews with QZ and LY excerpted above illustrate, open-air movies appear to have some type of influence on the origin of the postwar generation's war dreams. During interviews, many members of both the pre- and postwar generations said they dreamt about the war after watching movies. Particularly among the postwar generation, seven out of 11 respondents said this. LY says the following about movies.¹³

Ishii: Where does your strongest impression of the Sino-Japanese War come from?

LY: Movies. Even now when I watch movies, the same reaction happens inside my brain. But I still can't resist watching them, and the result (having a nightmare about the war) is the same every time.

(Abridged)

Ishii: Do you still have these dreams?

LY: I had them more often when I was a child. They became less frequent later on, but I still do have them. Recently they've stopped showing the open-air movies, but I do feel that those

¹³ Interview with LY at the L residence in Gaozhuang on December 3, 2006.

movies stayed in my memory as the strongest image of the war.

LC (male, b. 1950) also spoke of having dreams after seeing movies.¹⁴

Ishii: Have you ever dreamt about the Japanese army?

LC: Yes. After watching movies, I would get very scared, and at night when I went to bed I would dream about it.

Ishii: What kind of dreams were they?

LC: Dreams that I am running from place to place in the village. Dreams that I am frightened and hiding in different places. Even when I woke up my whole body would be shaking.

Ishii: Did you have these dreams often?

LC: *If I didn't see the movies, I didn't have the dreams. Every time I watched one of those movies, I had the dream.*

ZX (male, b. 1951) echoed the italicized portion of LC's comments, saying that "I often have dreams after watching movies, but I don't have them after listening to the stories of the elders,"¹⁵ suggesting that the dreams were stimulated by movies. It seems that dreams, which are hallucinations that we experience while sleeping, are related to movies in that both are visual images. We can also surmise from QZ and LC's comments that movies and stories told by the older generation blend together, and both relate to the way in which members of the postwar generation remember the war.

In contrast, the dreams of the generation that experienced the war appear largely unrelated to movies. HZ, introduced above, says that she is afraid of movies about the war and has never gone to see one since the war ended.

Ishii: (Hearing that HZ is unable to go out at night for fear of seeing the cistern into which someone had been thrown) If that's the case, are you able to watch movies without becoming afraid?

HZ: Ahh! (Expressing surprise), even if there's just a brief war scene I go home right away.

Ishii: You haven't seen any since the liberation?

HZ: I was never brave enough to watch one, not even once.

In every village, one can hear similar stories of elderly people who are

¹⁴ Interview with LC at the residence of LA in Zhaojiazhuang on December 16, 2006.

¹⁵ Interview with ZX at ZX's residence in Gaozhuang on December 11, 2006.

unable to watch movies. GE (female, b. 1953) of Tonglu gets agitated when she watches movies, and says that “I couldn’t sleep even if I took tranquilizers, so I can’t watch war movies.”¹⁶ In Nanshe, I was told that every time a war movie was shown, there was a woman of the wartime generation who would tell people to hurry home because it was dangerous, and run back home herself.¹⁷ There are innumerable examples of elderly people, particularly women, who are unable to watch movies calmly because reality blends with the movie. The fact that the generation that experienced the war has war dreams even without watching movies indicates that their dreams are based on their own specific experiences. In contrast, the dreams recounted by the postwar generation are slightly abstract, and strongly influenced by movies. This indicates that although the generation that experienced the war and the postwar generation have the same dreams, the source of information for those dreams is different.

Among the postwar generation, many villagers say they learned about the war by watching movies, including those who don’t dream about it, while only a relatively small number emphasize having learned about the war from the stories told by the elderly. This suggests the large impact of movies on the formation of villagers’ war memories. For example, CZ (male, b. 1965) says the following about movies.¹⁸

Ishii: Did you learn about what happened during the war from stories the elders told?

CZ: Of course the elders did talk about it. But I also know about it from watching TV and movies. I also learned about it in my schoolbooks.

(Abridged)

Ishii: After watching the movies, what impression did you have?

CZ: After I saw the movies, especially after I was a bit more aware of the world, I understood that the Japanese army had launched a war of aggression against China. If I hadn’t seen those movies, I wouldn’t have known what kind of existence Japan was or what the Japanese looked like when they came here. After watching the movies, I knew that the Japanese army was completely uncivilized, and that they carried guns and had bayonets. The Japanese were very cruel.

CZ said he was deeply shocked when his father told him about the harm

¹⁶ Interview with GE at GR’s residence in Tonglu on November 12, 2006.

¹⁷ Interview with ZL at ZF’s residence in Nanshe on November 30, 2006.

¹⁸ Interview with CZ at the C’s residence in Dongpan on November 18, 2006.

that had befallen his family during the war. Nevertheless, he emphasized the impact of open-air movies on his memories of the war. His comments reveal both the magnitude and nature of the impact of the movies. That is to say, the war was discussed routinely in the villages after it had ended. However, no medium existed in rural China at that time through which visual images of the war could be conveyed. When open-air movies began circulating, they portrayed the war visually and systematically for the first time. Presumably, dreamlike war memories then for one reason or another spread among the postwar generation of villagers in this region.

3. *Open-air Movies Shown in the Villages (Yu County, Shanxi)*

In order to understand the impact of open-air movies on the postwar generation, we must first consider how they were screened and viewed.

Regardless of the fact that villagers often mention them as the source of their memories, movies about the Second Sino-Japanese War make up only a small percentage of all movies produced in China. Of the 1105 movies produced during the 30 years from 1949 to 1979, 53, or a mere 5 percent, were about the war. The movies that villagers remember were produced over a wide span of years, with *Pingyuan youji dui* [*Guerilla of the Plain*] released in 1955, *Tiedao youji dui* [*Railway Guerillas*] in 1956, *Dilei zhan* [*Mine Warfare*] in 1962, *Xiaobing Zhang Ga* [*Little Soldier Zhang Ga*] in 1963, and *Didao zhan* [*Tunnel Warfare*] in 1965, but no matter the production date, villagers remember those that were “well made.” Even in the years when the most movies about the Second Sino-Japanese War were made, the total never exceeded five for any year, and these films were not promoted to any unusual extent for political reasons. To the contrary, a greater number of the movies produced dealt with the Chinese Civil War, the Great Leap Forward, scientific technology, and history.¹⁹

In Yu County, Shanxi’s Provincial Film Screening Team began irregular screenings of traveling open-air movies in 1951.²⁰ According to *Zhongguo wenhuaguan zhi* [the History of the China Culture Center],²¹ in 1949 the villages of Yu County had at most one movie screening during the year, because they were dependent upon Shanxi’s screening team. By 1954, a first and second screening

¹⁹ Zhongguo dianying ziliaoguan, Zhongguo yishu yanjiuyuan dianying yanjiusuo ed., *Zhongguo yishu yingpian bianmu* [China art and film list], Vol. 1 and 2, (Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe), 1981.

²⁰ Yuxian renmin xianzhi qicao weiyuanhui ed., *Yuxian renmin xianzhi* [Yu County People’s History], (Taiyuan: Taiyuan yinshua, 1961), pp. 225-230.

²¹ Zhongguo yishuguan choubeichu, Beijing geren jingji jishu yanjiusuo ed., *Zhongguo wenhuaguan zhi* (Beijing: Zhuanli wenxian chubanshe, 1999), pp. 248-249.

team had been established at the Yu County Cultural Center and these teams began touring the villages to hold open-air movie screenings. As a result, screenings increased to two or three times per year in each village.²² In 1970, a “cultural station” was established in each town,²³ and every township was assigned two “screeners” who traveled from village to village in the township showing movies.

According to interviews with the three former screeners in the study area, a screening team was established in Xiyan Town, to which 40 villages belonged, and Nanshe, to which 17 villages belonged. Since three screeners traveled from village to village in the region showing movies, starting in 1970 movies were screened once every two months in every village.²⁴ On the other hand, in Xipan Township, located about 20 km north of Xiyan Town, two screeners were assigned to the township’s 27 villages and eight natural villages, with the result that movies were screened once a month. In 1985 the showing of movies was privatized, each producing brigade bought a television, and movie theaters were built in the towns. As a result, open-air screenings declined, and in 2000 they were halted altogether. The peak for open-air movies occurred between the 1970s and 1980s. During this period screenings consisted of the so-called *San zhan shi ban* (three war films and ten model dramas), which included three movies about the Second Sino-Japanese War (*Tunnel Warfare*, *Mine Warfare*, and *Little Soldier Zhang Ga*) and ten revolutionary model dramas.²⁵ Even today villagers frequently mention these movies in interviews. Before and after the screenings, *linhuanhua* picture books were circulated.²⁶ These books presented the movie’s plot through a series of pictures and simple sentences. There were two types, one using still photographs taken from the movies, and the other using drawings. Both reproduced scenes from the movies with great accuracy.

But why did the relatively few movies about the Second Sino-Japanese War make such a strong impression on the memories of the villagers? First, the

²² *Yuxian zhi*, *ibid*, pp. 526-537.

²³ Culture stations were lower branches of the Ministry of Culture. They belonged directly to the cultural centers in each province and county, and served as centers for producing popular culture through cultural activities and library projects. In addition to organizing the traveling movies, the culture stations lent out *linhuanhua* picture books.

²⁴ Interviews with LM at the Yu County shizhiyuan in Yuxian County, and with YD at the Yu County Public Security Bureau on December 18, 2006. L served as a screener in Xiyan Town from 1972 to 1976, after which Y took over and served from 1976 to 1986.

²⁵ Of the three war movies, *From Victory to Victory* dealt with the Chinese Civil War, but interview participants mentioned it as a movie about the Second Sino-Japanese War.

²⁶ The above material is based on interviews at the residence of HL (male b. 1955) in Jinguishe on December 16, 2006. H served as a screener in Xipan Township from 1975 through 2000.

movies were extremely welcome in the rural villages, where little entertainment was available; with the exception of small children and elderly people who could not leave their homes, virtually all the villagers gathered in the town or village square to see the movies.²⁷ Second, it is likely that movies about the Second Sino-Japanese War were shown repeatedly. Screeners went once a month to pick up movies at the movie management station in Yu County, and screened the movies designated by the station for the next month. They took three movies with them when traveling to villages and screened two in each village. One would be the new movie selected by the county, and the other would be a movie popular with villagers selected from among two previously screened movies the screeners had with them. Movies about the Second Sino-Japanese war were particularly popular, so they were shown repeatedly.

According to LG (male, b. 1956), who watched the movies during that era,²⁸ they were treated as a special occasion. On days when the screening team came to town, villagers were excused from the meetings that usually took place at the People's Congress after work. Youths between 16 and 30 years of age were not satisfied simply to watch the movies in their own village, but rather would follow the screeners to villages within a two or three kilometer radius to watch the movies there as well. As a result, they would see the same movies five or six times. According to him, the movies were worth watching multiple times, and his aim was not simply to watch them but also to hear the stories of the elderly people and screeners at the showing locations. He says it was also a good opportunity to meet farmers from other villages and look for potential marriage partners. Young villagers throughout Xipan Township followed the screeners around in the same way, and it is likely that all villagers born in the 1960s watched the movies under similar conditions. War movies were therefore shown more frequently than government rules at the time stipulated, and villagers saw the same movies even more times than they were shown in each village. Through repetition, the impressions made by the movies naturally became stronger and remained in the memory of villagers. Furthermore, because the postwar generation attended screenings alongside the generation that had experienced the war, conditions were presumably ideal for them to become emotionally involved with the movies.

However, the *San zhan shi ban* movies were intended as entertainment.

²⁷ Cultural works also depict the arrival of movies in the villages. Yi Xiangdong's "Dianying ou Dianying" portrays the frenzy that surrounded the arrival of the open-air movies, and the detailed descriptions of that era match HL's narrative almost perfectly. (Yi Xiangdong "Dianying ou Dianying" [Film, oh film], *Xiaoshuo yuebao 2005nian jingpin ji*, (Tianjing: Baihuawenyi chubanshe), 2006)

²⁸ Interview with LG at the L household in Xiyan Town on December 18, 2006.

They depicted the victory of the Communist Party and militias in the Second Sino-Japanese War, and they portrayed Japanese soldiers as ludicrous, while strong farmers and militia members took the leading roles. In the three war movies that were screened, the only scene that resembles the villagers' dream of escaping to the mountains takes place at the beginning of *Mine Warfare*. This indicates that while the movies stimulated the postwar villagers to dream about war, the content of their dreams was not related to the plots of the movies. Thus the questions arise of why villagers say they learned about the war from movies, and where the typical plot of their dreams came from.

III Why Did the Content of Dreams and Movies Differ?

1. *Stories Told by Elders (Experiences in the Uninhabited Zones)*

As illustrated in the interview with QZ discussed above, in which he says dreams mingled with stories told by the elders, these stories do appear to have influenced the content of dreams. In interviews, the generation of villagers that lived through the war frequently recounted the story of escaping to the mountains when the Japanese army came as a real experience from their lives. This relates to the fact that the Japanese army established an uninhabited zone throughout the entire region. For example, YM (female, b. 1932) lived in Zhaojiazhuang, which became an uninhabited zone. She lost her parents in the 1944 Zhaojiazhuang Massacre, and describes her experience of escaping with her younger brother as follows.²⁹ The focus of the story is on how they escaped from the Japanese army and how difficult their lives were afterwards.

Ishii: How many people were there in your family?

Y: Seven, and of those only my little brother and I survived.

Ishii: How did you survive?

Y: I escaped with a man from the village. I could run at the time (even though my feet were bound). When he went one place, I went there too, and when he went to another place I followed. In that way, we made it to a nearby village. It wasn't so far from Zhaojiazhuang, and I escaped there with that man. My father and mother were already dead and my little brother was only three. I took him with me and ran away frantically. We survived by begging.

Ishii: What happened to the rest of your family?

²⁹ Interview with YM at the Y's residence in Gaozhuang on September 15, 2006.

- Y: Everyone else died. At the time, I wasn't in the village. There was a traitor (collaborator with the Japanese) in the village, and they killed everyone, even the dogs and chickens.
- Ishii: Where did you sleep?
- Y: There was no way I could go back home. Everyone slept in rough caves or fields in the mountains. Children whose parents were still alive were able to sneak back to their houses when the Japanese weren't watching and make warm food to eat, but no one looked out for the ones like us who had lost our parents. We had nothing to eat or drink.

HZ, quoted above, had gotten married and moved to Zhaojiazhuang a year before the massacre happened. She tells the following story about encountering a Japanese soldier in the mountains, where she was secretly living after her village had been turned into an uninhabited zone.³⁰

I once met a Japanese soldier in the mountains. He demanded I give him *yinyuan* (the silver coins in circulation at the time) and when I didn't, he hit me. After he hit me I ran and ran and ran (she repeats this numerous times) to get away. I ran towards the *huang hao* (a type of wormwood). All I could see was the wormwood.

People whose villagers were not turned into uninhabited zones also spoke in interviews about the experience of running away. HC (female, b. 1926), who lives in Xiyan Town, tells the following story.³¹

- Ishii: (After HC talks about moving from village to village during the war to escape the Japanese army) What happened after that?
- HC: Things were really hard. It was so bad I can't think about the horrible things that happened. *The instant I saw a Japanese person I would run away. I was so scared I couldn't stay in my house. I ran away without eating or drinking. At night, I slept in a cave.*
- (Abridged)
- Ishii: At the time, were you doing anything for the Eighth Route Army?
- HC: I made shoes. *I was afraid that the Japanese would come, and*

³⁰ Outdoor interview with HZ in Zhaojiazhuang on August 20, 2007.

³¹ Interview with HC at the LG residence in Xiyan Town on September 22, 2006.

so I ran from place to place. At night, I slept outside. My uncle was so scared the Japanese army would come that he left his own children and ran away.

(Abridged)

Ishii: After the war ended did you talk to the people around you about what you had seen and heard during the war?

HC: Yes. *Those days were truly terrifying. At night, I crawled into a cave and hid. I didn't have a bed, and I made myself stay sitting up so that I could escape right away if the Japanese army came.*

The village where she lived, Niuweiba, had not been designated an uninhabited zone. The Japanese had made the neighboring village of Liuxinzhuang, into an uninhabited zone, however, and in order to avoid the same fate, the men of Niuweiba took turns delivering information to the Japanese base in Xiyan Town every day without fail. However, her distant relative LG, who sat in on the interview, explains that she wanted to run away because she was afraid of the Japanese army, and so she spent a year moving between Yangquan, Liuxinzhuang, Xiangcaoliang, and other villages, relying on relatives. Residents of many villages in this region tell a similar story of running away to the mountains because they feared their village would become an uninhabited zone, even though it hadn't yet happened.

Within the course of an approximately one-hour interview, HC repeated many times over the same story of being afraid, running away, and sleeping in a cave (the italicized portions above). She wasn't necessarily answering questions but rather repeating the same story as if she was remembering the harm that she had experienced. As the interviewer, I attempted to elicit as much detail as possible, asking questions about massacres that occurred nearby and what happened after the war, but the conversation always looped back to how she ran away from the Japanese. However, while the story lacks concrete details, her answers convey how the war as experienced by an 18-year-old woman with bound feet is remembered, and what she most wants to communicate about it.

Residents of Jinguishe, which has a Japanese base and was not at risk of being turned into an uninhabited zone, describe a similar experience of escaping to the mountains. HL (female, b. 1926) tells the following story.³²

Ishii: Please tell me something you remember about when the Japanese army came.

³² Interview with HL at the H's residence in Jinguishe on September 12, 2006.

HL: There were people who were killed and houses that were burned. We were all *too scared to go back to our houses, so we lived in the mountains*. I remember that.

Ishii: How long did you live in the mountains?

HL: I lived there for several years. I was *too scared to go back home*. The Japanese told us (through Chinese people) to go home, but when I did go home I got scared again and went back to the mountains. The same thing happened over and over. One time I ran away to my parents' house and stayed there for a few days. I was running here and there, *too frightened to go back home*.

(Abridged)

Ishii: Please tell me about the women who were locked up in your house.

HL: HD from Gaozhuang was imprisoned the longest. The Japanese started to look at her and then they took her here and shut her up for ten days. I was *so scared I couldn't go back home*. I had a friend named Xiaomei, and her face would be covered in sweat every time she went home. The Japanese soldiers gave an order to the village sanitation force to come looking for me at my parents' house. They had searched for me in Xitou but didn't find me, so they turned the house upside down. At that time, I hid for many days, but I was too scared to sleep at night. I was ready to run away at any moment. I was beautiful when I was young, and apparently the Japanese had their eye on me.

The Japanese had built a battery in Jinguishe and made it into a base, so it wasn't turned into an uninhabited zone. However, many Japanese came in and out of the village, and some of the villagers hid out in the mountains because they were afraid of them. HL appears to have been particularly afraid of the Japanese army's sexual violence because she was a young woman at the time. Interviewees told me that women from the village were in fact raped by Japanese soldiers, and HL's house was for a time turned into a "comfort station"-like site where women from other villages were brought and locked up. Compared to HC, HL's narrative is concrete and easy to understand, but she, too, repeatedly speaks of being "too scared to go home" (italicized above). Her repetition of the same phrase conveys just how painful the experience was for her.

Men also spoke of escaping to the mountains. ZF (male, b. 1933) plays a leadership role in Nanshe, where he performs I Ching (a type of divination). Four

members of his family were killed in the massacre at Nanshe, and he himself was taken to the Japanese base and imprisoned. Even today, when he speaks of this incident his eyes overflow with tears. He describes the village during that period as follows.³³

At that time, none of the houses had gates or gardens.³⁴ Everyone had gotten rid of them so they could escape more easily. People couldn't till their fields because they were afraid the Japanese would come, so life was extremely difficult. The Japanese had taken everything in the houses that was made of copper. They wanted copper and they took everything down to the copper spoons. At the time, we weren't able to eat salt. If the Japanese found salt, they would assume we were in contact with the Communist Party. No one could go home to sleep at night, so we escaped to the mountains and hid.

The Japanese carried out a massacre in Nanshe, his village, in 1941, killing 32 villagers. After that, a mayor who cooperated with the Japanese was installed, and every day information was delivered to the Japanese base in Xiyan Town. Japanese began coming in and out of the village, and especially at night they did whatever they wanted, so predictably the villagers hid out and lived in the mountains.

When a nearby village was turned into an uninhabited zone, word would spread to the surrounding villages within the same day. When the Japanese army came around to stir up their fear, it is likely that many villagers chose to escape to the mountains, even in villages that had not been declared an uninhabited zone. This is why, even today villagers throughout the region often speak about the experience of running from the Japanese army. Each person's individual experience of the war was different, and the postwar generation heard a wide diversity of stories over the years. However, we can surmise that the situation described above is most likely the reason why the collective memory that remained with them from those diverse stories was the one about escaping to the mountains. The widely shared memories of the uninhabited zones in this way exceed their actual extent. The villagers' experience of the uninhabited zones cannot be understood simply by looking at figures or documents, and is an issue that requires further consideration.

³³ Interview with ZF at the Z's residence in Nanshe on September 16, 2006.

³⁴ This refers to the courtyard in a traditional courtyard house, in which rooms are built to the north, east, and west of a central courtyard. In most cases multiple generations live in the home, sharing the courtyard. Nanshe is a relatively prosperous village and therefore has many houses with courtyards.

2. *Dreams Before the Movies*

Memories about escaping to the mountains likely existed in common before the movie screenings began. This is evident from the comments that some members of the postwar generation make about having war dreams before they began to watch movies. For example, ZX (male, b. 1949), quoted above, says the following.

- Ishii: Why do you think you didn't have many dreams before you were 14 (and started watching movies), but the dreams increased around that time?
- ZX: That's when I started to believe the stories the old people told. After that, I started to have fears, as my own thoughts, or if not that, then within my mind. Isn't that probably the reason I started having bad dreams at night?
- Ishii: So you hadn't thought much about the war before then?
- ZX: I had thought about it. But I didn't have many dreams about it. Still, I did have them. For example, when I worked hard and was really tired, I'd dream at night and wake up feeling scared. Somehow (although I don't remember clearly), I think I was dreaming about the Japanese chasing me and catching me and being about to kill me, like the elders talked about.

ZW (male, b. 1966), of Nanshe, was particularly tormented by war dreams. He also had an extremely good memory, so he spoke in great detail about his dreams before the movie screenings began.³⁵

- ZW: When I was little, I heard adults talking about Japan's invading army coming into the village and stealing pigs and chickens, and so I carried this spiritual trauma within me. When I went to sleep at night I always dreamt about those scenes.
- Ishii: You dreamt about it.
- ZW: I didn't have an image of the invading army, but the event was there in my mind. I think somehow that's what happened. At

³⁵ Interview with ZW at the residence of ZF in Nanshe on November 30, 2006. He remains deeply traumatized by the war, and at some points in the interview he had goose bumps from fear. He says he had the same dream on the day that I contacted him about the upcoming interview (from an interview with ZW at a restaurant in Xiyan Town on August 13, 2009).

that time, I'd see the Japanese *gui* (invaders)³⁶ in my dreams at night. I'd dream about the Japanese *gui* coming, and me feeling frightened and running this way and that. If you ask me why I had this dream, I definitely think it's because the adults talked about the war all the time. Because the adults talked about it so often, this terror developed in my heart. I heard about it from my parents, and also from my uncle and grandfather. Everyone talked about it. This was when I was five, before I went to elementary school.

Ishii: Did you have the dream often?

ZW: I'd have it once a week. At that time, I hadn't seen the movies yet. *Gui without clearly defined forms* would appear, but somehow I knew *the ones shaped like humans* were Japanese *gui*, that *gui* had come. I'd run this way and run that way, and sometimes I followed grownups who were escaping. At that time, I didn't know what a *gui* was like. I was just utterly terrified. That was the feeling in my heart. In the dreams, I was just terrified. I had that same dream over and over again.

His dreams lacked a clear visual image of the Japanese army; he had inherited only the feeling of fear and the story of running from the Japanese army. Villagers in the postwar generation say in interviews that they were not able to understand what happened simply by listening to the elders speak, but I would like to suggest that in listening to these experiences, they may have absorbed the type of undefined fear that appears in this dream. How did the memories of children in this psychological state change when they began to watch open-air movies? In the case of ZW, he says he was tormented by "*gui* without clearly defined forms" until he began to watch movies and learn about the Second Sino-Japanese War at school. He describes the changes that took place at that time as follows.

Later, when I came into contact with *lianhuanhua* and movies, I acquired a clear sense of what they looked like. And once I had that, my image of the war became even deeper.

Of course, villagers who dreamt about the war are not the only ones who

³⁶ In Chinese, the term *gui* means both ghost and invader. The *gui* that ZW speaks of are members of the Japanese army, but he distinguishes them from the "invading army," and is also evoking an image of "ghostlike" beings with unknown forms. For these reasons, I have intentionally retained the Chinese term *gui* here.

talk about acquiring a clear image from the movies. HL (male, b. 1955), mentioned above, also emphasizes the images in the movies.³⁷

- HL: Thinking about my own memories of the war, I learned about the war when I saw *Tunnel Warfare*. I saw it for the first time in my teens.
- Ishii: Had you never heard the elders talking about it or anything before then?
- HL: I'd heard the elders talking about it before, and I'd been to the battery³⁸ in Jinguishu. You can still see it today if you go up in the mountains. But I had no idea what the Japanese looked like, or if their skin was the same color as mine. I learned those things for the first time when I saw the movie. After I saw the movie, I was able to recognize a Japanese person's face.
- HL: Ever since I was little, before I had seen the movie, I heard the elders talking about the war, but my image of the war then was different from what I learned from watching the movie.
- Ishii: How was it different?
- HL: The movies made the images concrete. The forms became clear.

When the postwar generation listened to stories told by those who had experienced the war, they were filled with a vague fear that was not accompanied by any visual images. Particularly for this reason, they say they were "extremely interested and thirsty for the reality" (ZW) of the war. In addition, the fact that many young people wanted to overcome the fear they had absorbed may have been another reason they felt it necessary to watch war movies.³⁹

³⁷ Interview with HL at the H's residence in Jinguishu on December 16, 2006.

³⁸ Even today, some of the gun batteries that the Japanese army forced villagers to build remain standing. During the 1960s and 1970s, as part of the political and ideological training program called *yikusitian* ("recall one's sufferings in the old society and contrast them with the happiness in the new"), children attending elementary schools around Jinguishu visited the battery and listened to elderly people who had lived through the war talk about their experiences.

³⁹ Judith L. Herman discusses "reconstructing the story" as one stage of trauma treatment. This treatment method "'recreate[s] the flow' of the patient's life and restore a sense of continuity with the past." Particularly when traumatic memories have visual characteristics, "creating pictures may represent the most effective initial approach to these 'indelible images.'" (Judith Lewis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), pp.176-178). Many interviewee do in fact speak of overcoming their fear through watching movies. Movies may have served as one form of trauma treatment for the villagers. However,

3. *Toward the Transmission of Personal Experience*

It is possible to infer the specific changes that watching movies brought about in the postwar generation from interview passages such as the following. This is a continuation of the dream narrative related by QZ (male, b. 1956), quoted above.⁴⁰

Ishii: Are the places you dream about always in the village?

QZ: Yes. I saw the images in the movies and also heard the stories from the elders. But when my father and grandfather were young, that's exactly what it was like.

Ishii: Do you mean that the movies and the stories of the elders mixed together?

QZ: Yes. *It was only when they blended together that I had a sense of, well, you and I are friends now, but at that time, of how the Japanese bullied the Chinese.*

(Abridged)

QZ: When I was little, I didn't know what was going on. So, I wasn't very interested in the war and I didn't worry about it much. But when I started to be more aware of things, and I started to watch movies, I understood. The Japanese at the time were so cruel.

Ishii: So, are you saying that when you started to watch movies, that impression became stronger?

QZ: Yes. I was *able to comprehend the cruelty* of the Japanese and the cruelty of the invasion of China. At the time, when the elders talked, I was little so I didn't really understand what they were saying. And I didn't really care about it. *But when I saw the movies I got extremely emotionally worked up and excited.* I was completely engrossed in the movies, in seeing what the Japanese were like at the time. *Up till then, even when I listened to the elders talk, I had thought that they were just talking off the top of their heads.* So, I didn't pay much attention. *Once I had seen the movies, and then I heard the*

Herman does not mention past events that an individual has not experienced, and it is unclear whether her theory applies to the memories of postwar villagers. I have therefore interpreted the psychological condition of the postwar villagers as one of feeling the movies were necessary.

⁴⁰ Interview with QZ at the Q's residence in Lizhuang on December 11, 2006.

Yumi Ishii, "The Transmission of Wartime Memories: Films, Stories, and Dreams in Rural Villages of Shanxi, China," *Oral History Forum d'histoire orale* 37 (2017), Special Issue on Generations and Memory: Continuity and Change.

stories from the elders again, I understood them more deeply. That the Japanese had invaded China, and that they were so horribly cruel.

QZ's comments reveal how watching the movies helped him understand past events as a physically sensed reality. He says that through this new physical sense, he was able to understand the stories of the elders more deeply, or to believe them. He repeatedly mentions the cruelty of the Japanese army, yet the series of war movies produced in the postwar years contain a prevalence of scenes depicting the Japanese soldiers as buffoons. It is possible that his previous exposure to the stories of the elders swayed him to interpret these scenes as displays of cruelty. However, it was only when he watched the movies that he was able to sense that cruelty.

LY, quoted above, makes the following similar comments.⁴¹

Ishii: (First part of question omitted) So you recalled what you had heard before?

LY: After I saw the open-air movies, I *replayed everything* (about the Second Sino-Japanese war) in my mind like a movie (meaning that he recalled a continuous stream of events similar to a film playing). *What I had heard and what I had seen was all connected in there.*

(Abridged)

Ishii: Did you have any dreams after you watched the movies?

LY: After I saw open-air movies, thoughts would start running through my brain, and I couldn't think calmly. I would start reacting to the movie.

(Abridged)

Ishii: So which made a stronger impression on you, the harm your father suffered or the movies?

LY: The harm to my father and the movies are two different things. *When I see the scenes in movies of the Japanese army invading China, I feel really angry. But as soon as I see that, I remember what happened to my father. His experience becomes mixed with the movie and associated with it.* The stories the elders told about things that happened during the war became imprinted on my brain. They left a deep impression on the minds of our whole generation.

⁴¹ Interview with LY at the L residence in Gaozhuang on August 22, 2007.

LY's father died as a result of the Japanese army's invasion, and his mother had no choice but to remarry. As a result, LY was forced to live on his own at the age of 12, and he always emphasizes that he is an indirect victim of the war. However, when he talks about this, the influence of movies on his memories of the war is evident. In other words, through the process of family history and movies becoming "mixed together" and "associated", LY came to experience the memory of his father's suffering as a more lifelike "personal experience." Furthermore, this caused the traces of the past that he had heard and seen to become linked together and understood by him as a continuous narrative. What he is attempting to communicate here is that this understanding and emotional agitation connects to dreams.

LG (male, b. 1956) describes his feelings upon watching the movies as follows. He does not have war dreams, but his narrative suggests the same melding together of images from movies and stories told by elders.⁴²

LG: The younger people hadn't experienced the war, but when they heard the stories of the elders and then saw scenes in the movies of the Japanese army mistreating the villagers, *they had this sensation that is just indescribable.*

Ishii: Was that true for you as well?

LY: I heard about the war from my maternal grandfather. Once, when he was delivering village information to the Japanese army's battery, the Japanese army's intelligence team beat him so badly he couldn't move. When the villagers carried him back, he couldn't take his clothes off. His entire body was swollen up like a balloon, all swollen up. So, they had to cut his clothes off with scissors. *When I heard that story from my maternal grandfather and then saw the movie afterwards, the impression was especially strong.* For sure, that's what things were like in the past.

In particular, when LG had that "indescribable feeling," the stories he had heard became real for him. His comments suggest that it was not when he heard his grandfather talk about his personal experiences but rather when those stories melded with images from movies that they made a strong emotional impression on him. The movies also made a deeper impression on him at that time.

Only when the postwar generation watched war movies do they appear to have understood on a visceral level the past events that they had heard about from those who experienced the war. The war memories of the Chinese, which we may

⁴² Interview with LG at the Yu County Guesthouse in Yuxian County on December 18, 2006.

also call the transmission of their personal experiences, can be understood as arising not from either hearing stories from elders or watching movies, but rather from the fusion of these movies and stories. This suggests that the villagers' shared dream of running from the Japanese army is the result of images from movies fusing with the archetypal stories of the elders. Furthermore, by dreaming about the war, the postwar villagers experienced it personally (vicariously).

IV The Synergy of Movies and Collective Farming

1. Conversations during Collective Farming

One factor that likely contributed to the fusion of stories told by the elders with images from movies was the collectivization of farming, which created an environment unique to China. In the study area, open-air movies were shown from 1954 until 1980, and collective farming was practiced during almost the same period, from 1952 until 1983. The artificially constructed community of collective farms where everyone worked alongside each other presented an opportunity for conversation and likely encouraged the sharing of memories.

As discussed above, when open-air movies were screened nearly everyone in the village gathered in the square to watch them, meaning that the pre- and postwar generations viewed the movies together. Villagers say that these screenings were extremely lively, with some people breaking down in tears and elders recalling past events and talking about them in the middle of the movie. At night, people would gather in the village office where the screeners were spending the night to ask them about the details of certain scenes and have lively conversations about the war. Because multiple people told stories of their personal experiences in the war, postwar villagers absorbed a wealth of information that included the emotions of war survivors—far more so than if they had been watching television alone in their rooms.

The day after a movie was shown, it would be the sole topic of conversation as people worked. Under collective farming, nearly all the villagers over the age of 16 who belonged to the same commune worked together. For this reason, there were more opportunities for young and old people to come into contact than there were either before collectivization or after the Chinese economic reform. During interviews, ZX, quoted above, repeatedly spoke of the impact of the conversations that took place while working.⁴³

ZX: For people my age, collective farming was happening just as I was starting to understand the world and be able to work.

⁴³ Interview with ZX at the Z residence in Gaozhuang on December 11, 2006.

Everyone worked together, and there were still elderly people around who had experienced the war. For example, during the war, the Japanese army chased the Eighth Route Army to Gaozhuang, but they didn't know who was in that army so they mistakenly killed a lot of villagers. I heard about that from the elders. It was frightening. This type of incident in the village was the same as the events in the movies.

(Abridged)

Ishii: So the movies had a big impact (on your dreams about the war).

ZX: Yes. TV and movies, and then the *lianhuanhua*. When we were young, the movies and the *lianhuanhua* always reflected those things (the stories of the elders). In other words, they (the movies) were those stories (of the elders). For example, we often watched movies together. The next day, while we were doing farm work in the fields, the elders would say, "the events in that movie were just like what happened in real life." They encountered the same things here during the war, or else similar things happened.

These comments indicate that within the distinctive context of collective agriculture, images of war from movies were frequently discussed outside the screenings, reinforcing memories. At the same time, *lianhuanhua* were widely distributed between showings, and as a result, villagers repeatedly viewed still versions of scenes from the movies. These repetitive recollections likely caused them to more deeply internalize emotional memories.

Many villagers related the same experience. Like ZL (male, b. 1956), who says, "I only participated in collective labor for a little over a year, but during that short period of time I heard many stories," and WJ (male, b. 1956), who says, "The first I heard of the war was when I participated in collective labor at the age of 15 or 16," many postwar villagers emphasize the impact of collective farming. In addition, conversations during collective farming presented an ideal opportunity for elders to communicate their experiences of the war. This is evident in ZM's (male, b. 1930) lament: "When we all split up (at the start of the production responsibility system), we stopped talking."

2. *The End of Collective Agriculture and Changes in Memories*

During the transition from collective farming to the production responsibility system, war memories became individualized as people lost the opportunity to

share them. This is clear from the fact that the villagers who had war dreams match up almost perfectly with the generation that participated in collective farming. As Table 1 shows, the likelihood of dreaming about the Second Sino-Japanese War tends to decline with age. The youngest member of the postwar generation to have the dreams is NM, born in 1969, and the last generation to participate in collective agriculture in this region was born in 1966 or 1967. While the majority of villagers born prior to that dreamt about the war even if they belonged to the postwar generation, those born after 1967 did not report having war dreams, with the exception of NM. The reason that NM dreamt about the war is likely because she came from Zhaojiazhuang, where a massacre took place, and she grew up from a young age feeling closely connected to that event. Her generation also helped with collective farming during school holidays, and although they did not participate officially, they absorbed the atmosphere of the collective farms. The environment of the collective farming was one medium that played a large role in the sharing of memories, and this is reflected as another (other than pre- and postwar) generational gap related to memories.

Conclusion

This paper has discussed how memories of war have been shared and transmitted across generations in North China, with a focus on dreams, movies, and collective agriculture as media for transmitting these memories. In it, I have attempted to elucidate how it becomes possible for those who have not experienced a past event to remember it as if they did experience it. What I have taken away from this research is the idea that villagers do not remember the war simply because they heard people talking about it or saw movies about it, but rather because seeing movies caused them to absorb the stories told by their elders in a more visceral way, and in dreaming about these stories, they personally (vicariously) experienced them. In other words, this process allowed the postwar villagers to “experience” the war, and this is likely the reason they are able to speak about it as if they themselves remember it.

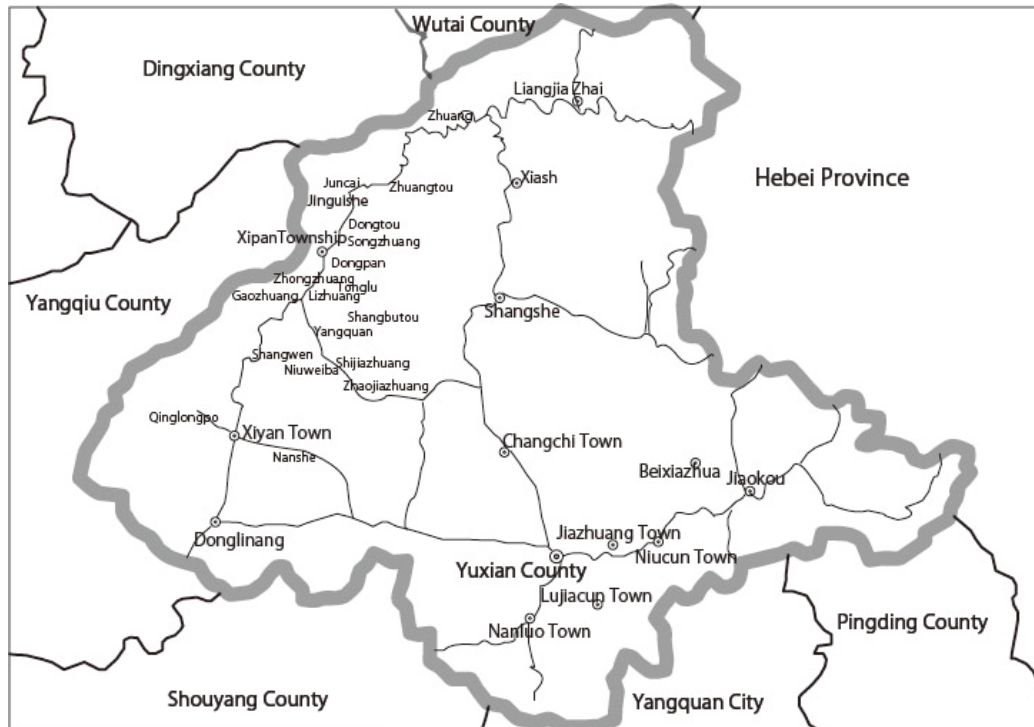
The discussion in this paper has proceeded on the understanding that the stories of the elders, movies, dreams, and collective farming, all function as media for transmitting war memories. However, it is only through changeable individuals that these dreams and movies can become vicarious experiences of the war. The sensation that a part or all of oneself has overlapped with another individual to experience the war indicates the flexibility of the self-identity and its ability to easily blend with another person's. Is it not through these individual connections that memories are shared and “collective memories” that go beyond generational or regional boundaries are established? If this is the case, then we

might ultimately say that human beings, too, are media for memories.

An Afterword

In this afterword, I would like to share the feelings I myself experienced as a Japanese woman carrying out interviews in rural Chinese villages. Ten years have passed since I began carrying out interviews about war memories, and in the interim I myself have inevitably changed. In my early interviews, I often became the target of blame within the context of conflict between the Chinese and Japanese people, and this was painful. Of course, the fact that I was Japanese created a sense of distance with my interlocutors—at the same time they talked to me *because* I was Japanese. The fact that I was still young and female also was one of the reasons the villagers talked about the past so freely. My interviews included not a few of experiences of sexual violence, but were I not a woman, I would not have heard these narrated. However, at some point in the course of carrying out many interviews, I realized that I had started to understand the villagers. It is difficult to explain what happened, but if I try to put it in words, I would say that a part of myself fell out, and a part of them entered in. I myself may have begun to accept their emotional memory. In the research method of oral history, changes in the identity of researchers (and interviewees) are inevitable. This may be regarded as a negative factor which affects research objectivity. In my case, however, it seems to be a necessary process to understand others. After that happened, these internal changes led me to search for paths toward understanding the other in my interviews. I would like to suggest that understanding the other does not happen by objectively explaining them, but rather only becomes possible once we ourselves begin to change.

Appendix 1. Map of the villages in Yu County referred in this article



Yumi Ishii, "The Transmission of Wartime Memories: Films, Stories, and Dreams in Rural Villages of Shanxi, China," *Oral History Forum d'histoire orale* 37 (2017), Special Issue on Generations and Memory: Continuity and Change.

Appendix 2. (Details of Table 1*)

Name	Year born	Gender	Village of residence	Content of dreams
ZX	1926	Male	Shangwen	For a period of time after the Japanese retreated, I had war dreams all the time. I remember having dreams, but I don't remember very clearly what they were about.
ZH	1927	Male	Yangquan	I often used to have dreams. The dreams also took place during the war.
HZ	1928	Female	Zhaojiazhuang	The war was scary. Even now sometimes I dream about the war at night and wake up because it's so scary. I am startled and I wake up. In the dreams everyone is running away and being beaten (by the Japanese soldiers). I have dreams all the time. Dreams where people are running away and the Japanese are chasing us and I hear the pow, pow sound of bullets from their guns flying at us.
ZM	1930	Male	Jinguishe	Dreams where the Japanese army comes and burns houses and kills people, and everyone runs away. I used to dream about the war all the time, and even now I sometimes do. It's usually the same dream. (In what situations do you have these dreams a lot?) Whenever I read about the Japanese invasion in a book or watch a movie about it I have the dream.
ZG	1932	Male	Xiyan Town	When the Japanese first left, I had dreams a lot. I dreamt all the time about them using villagers as coolies and beating them, or sometimes killing them or setting fires. When I went to sleep at night, I'd have dreams where the Japanese came! They're going to kill people again! I'd open my eyes in surprise and realize it was a dream. That happened all the time.
GE	1935	Female	Tonglu	Once I saw a movie in the daytime and was scared, and then at night I had a dream about war and Japanese soldiers. After watching a scary television show about the Japanese army, even if I take tranquilizers before I sleep, I still have scary dreams. So when they showed movies about the war, I was too scared to go see them.
LZ	1936	Male	Zhaojiazhuang	When I was little I used to have a lot of dreams.
LA	1936	Male	Zhaojiazhuang	I had dreams after watching TV and things like that.
ZM	1936	Male	Shangwen	When I was little, around seven or eight years old, I often had them. There's no chance I wouldn't have dreamt about the war! Even after the Japanese army left, I had dreams about Japanese people doing this or that. But I don't remember the details.
ZJ	1936	Male	Zhaojiazhuang	Even after the Japanese army left I saw them in my dreams. Could anyone not have dreamt about them? Dreams about hearing that the Japanese army was coming and quickly running away. There's no way that couldn't be scary. All the villagers were killed so there's no way it couldn't be scary.
LX	1938	Male	Gaozhuang	I've dreamt about the Japanese chasing after me. I try to escape but my legs have no strength and I can't move. I'm frightened and my breathing becomes fast and my body shakes. I don't know what spurred it to happen but when I was little I often had this dream, and I still have it now. When I was in my teens, I constantly dreamt that the Japanese were chasing after me, wearing that hat. The dreams about the war weren't always exactly the same, but they were always about being chased.
LQ	1938	Male	Qinglongpo	After I began to remember the massacres, I started to have the dreams.
LY	1943	Male	Gaozhuang	I didn't experience the war with Japan but I often dreamt about the Japanese army. They're chasing me but I don't have a place to run to, and just when they are about to catch me I wake up. It was a dream where my body would be soaked in sweat when I came to. I had the same dream repeatedly. I had it after I watched movies or TV.
ZX	1949	Male	Gaozhuang	After I watched movies or TV, I dreamt about the war with Japan. I'd wake up because I was afraid and startled. It was a dream about Japanese people appearing on the plateau in the village and trying to

Yumi Ishii, "The Transmission of Wartime Memories: Films, Stories, and Dreams in Rural Villages of Shanxi, China," *Oral History Forum d'histoire orale* 37 (2017), Special Issue on Generations and Memory: Continuity and Change.

				catch me and kill me. I had the same dream over and over.
LC	1949	Male	Gaozhuang	After I watched movies or TV, I'd go to sleep at night and dream about the Japanese army. In the dream, the Japanese army would come, and I would run around trying to escape, and feel frightened and hide. Even after I woke up my whole body wouldn't stop shaking. I had the same dream over and over.
ZS	1953	Male	Yangquan	From the time I started elementary school until now, I've had many dreams that I was like the elders, being chased by the Japanese soldiers and running away. Sometimes I was fighting the Japanese army, like in the movies. / I think it's strange myself, but even though I never saw a Japanese soldier I had this dream all the time. One time I had a really terrifying dream where a bunch of Japanese soldiers were chasing me as I tried to escape to the mountain behind my family's house. The soldiers had guns and they were trying to beat me. When I woke up my whole body would be cold or covered in sweat. After starting the lawsuit I stopped having this type of dream.
GA	1954	Female	Lizhuang	Sometimes after watching TV I'd dream about being chased by the Japanese army. In the dream, the tree on the top of the tall mountain that served as a signal had fallen over, so I was hurrying to run away. I dreamt about what the old people used to talk about a long time ago.
GJ	1954	Male	Gaozhuang	When I was little I dreamt that I was part of a movie about the Sino-Japanese War. Dreams about climbing to the top of a mountain or being irritated that a mine I'd buried didn't explode. I had the dream after hearing my uncle talk about being taken to Japan to do forced labor.
WL	1955	Male	Lizhuang	
QZ	1956	Male	Lizhuang	Usually after seeing a movie I'd have a dream that night. In the dream the Japanese army had come and the old people were saying "Hurry! Run away!" so I ran here and there, hiding in the mountains or the ditches, afraid that I would be caught.
XL	1957	Male	Yuxian County	I dreamt about running away from a Japanese <i>gui</i> (ghost or invader) that was attacking me.
ZF	1957	Male	Xiyan Town	None
ZB	1962	Male	Xiyan Town	None
LG	1965	Male	Xipan-Township	None
ZW	1966	Male	Nanshe	When I was six years old, I dreamt that a Japanese <i>gui</i> was coming and I was surprised and ran from west to east hiding out. I had the same dream repeatedly, once a week. It was scary.
LH	1967	Male	Zhaojiazhuang	None
NM	1969	Female	Zhaojiazhuang	I don't remember clearly, but I've dreamt about being chased by the Japanese army.
ZA	1971	Male	Jinguishe	None
LQ	1972	Male	Xiyan Town	None
BY	1972	Male	Lizhuang	None
LY	1973	Male	Gaozhuang	None
ZL	1990	Female	Nanshe	None

* Gray boxes indicate villagers in the postwar generation who dreamt about war

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